

A

# LETTER

To the Honourable  
*Sir Robert Howard:*

Together with some  
Animadversions

Upon a BOOK Entituled,

## Christianity not Mysterious.

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By *EDMUND ELRS*, some-  
time Fellow of *Baliol College* in  
*OXFORD.*

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Tὸν Ἀληδὴν οὐ περιχάκηται.

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L O N D O N :

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To the Honourable

# Sir Robert Howard.

SIR,

I Challenge the Performance of your Promise, " That you will not take it ill, if " any Man shall offer Reasons unclogg'd " with Passion against any thing you have " writ ; and that if you cannot clearly answer " them you will submit, and acknowledge " your Error. Amongst some Papers entitl'd, *Polemica Christiana*, publish'd before I saw the Book entitl'd, *A Twofold Vindication, &c.* there are some Reflections on your *History of Religion*, which, if I had known to have been yours, perhaps I might not have us'd some of the Expressions which you will find in those Reflections : But whatever they are, GOD is my Witness, no Inordinate Passion, but a Fervent Love of the Truth, you oppose, prompted me to those Conceptions, which I design'd to declare by them. That prodigious Huff of your Friend shall not dis-

courage me from publishing some more of my Amissadversions upon your Book.

" The History of Religion is a Test upon  
 " all its Readers : No Man can declare his  
 " Dislike of that Book, but at the same time  
 " he proclaims that he esteems the Substance  
 " of Religion to consist in that, which is least  
 " to be understood, that he is all for Disci-  
 " pline. GOD knows I am not for any other  
 Discipline but what may conduce to the Glo-  
 ry of GOD, and the Good of Men. Yet I  
 must declare to all the World that I dislike  
 your Book: In which, p. 43. I find these  
 Words: "I wish that among the most Re-  
 formed Christians these Methods of Priest-  
 craft were not so much, and violently pur-  
 sued; the Impositions to believe and pro-  
 fess unnecessary, and even extravagant  
 things, where neither Reason will justifie it,  
 nor does Religion require it. Here you  
 come out of your Hole, and plainly enough  
 acknowledge that you charge the Church of En-  
 gland with PRIESTCRAFT, as well as the  
 Church of Rome. Does not Religion require  
 that the Profession of believing that JESUS  
 CHRIST, the Saviour of the World, is the  
 true and eternal GOD, should be the princi-  
 pal Term of Christian Communion? If you shall  
 be pleas'd to let us know what you mean by  
 unnecessary, and even extravagant things, I  
 trust in GOD I shall be able to give you an  
 Answer. I have formerly animadverted on  
 these Words, p. 63. " A Man must be his  
 own Expositor, Minister, Bishop, and  
 Council

“Council. I shall now give you some of my Thoughts upon the Words following, “for “these will not bear his Punishment, he must “bear it himself.

*Answ.* Therefore a Man ought not to be his own Expositor, Minister, Bishop, and Council, because if he be so, he shall bear the Punishment of *Disobedience* to them, whom our blessed LORD, by his *Apostle*, commands him to obey, *Heb. 13.17.* *Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves, for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give Account.* “Those Powers and Authorities, say you, given to others, was the Cause of making and multiplying Creeds, and Rules of Faith, which ever were model'd according to the present Interests and Animosities of prevailing Parties. Here you revile all Councils, and consequently cut off your self from the Body of the *visible Church of CHRIST*. 'Tis evident that he cannot be a true Member of the Church of England that contemns the four first general Councils, or any one of them. To say that the Creeds, or Forms of sound Words, which were made by the Councils of *NICE* and *CONSTANTINOPLE* (the two other Councils, viz. *Eph.* and *Chalc.* made none) were not Modelled according to Godliness (*Kat' Euangelou*) but according to the present Interests and Animosities of prevailing Parties, is, I think, the greatest Slander, that any Gentleman professing himself to be a Member of the Church of England was ever guilty of,

however provok'd by any *Interest* or *Animosity*. I pray GOD to give you true Repentance. P. 96. "Tis not reasonable, say you, "to believe that GOD who knows our Infirmities, will punish *Error*; which is no Sin, "because it comes not from the Will and Intention: One Man may be weaker than another, and both may mistake more or less, according to the difference of their Capacities; but neither of them is thereby guilty, because the Mistakes and Opinions proceed from their Innocence, which is to say their Weakness and Ignorance. This Conceit of yours is grossly erroneous, that *Error* comes not from the *Will*. I grant that *Nescience*, or the not knowing of any thing, which comes not from the *Will* is no Sin: But I assert that all *Error* comes from the *Will*, being a *false* or irregular Judgment, an Assent to that which is false, or a Dissent from that which is true. 'Tis not only possible, but our absolute Duty to SUSPEND our Judgment, where we have no Evidence of the Truth or Falsehood of any Proposition. 'Tis wisely observ'd by the Stoicks, that "tis agreeable to Nature, that is, to right Reason, that we should suspend our Judgment concerning any thing, of which we have no Evidence.

*Epict.lib.3.cap.3.*

Πέπονται πάσα λυχή τις αληθεῖ επινεύειν, περὶ τὸ φένδος αἰνεῖν, περὶ τὸ ἀδηλον ἐπέχειν. "Every ( rational) Soul acting according to her Nature assents to that which is true, dissent from that which is false, suspends her Judgment in Matters of which she has no Evidence or Certainty

*Arrianus.*

" Certainty. All false Judgments are self-Conceits, which always proceed from self-will, which is the Head Spring or Fountain of all Iniquity. " I did not think to have taken " the Libeller to task, says your Friend, for " any other of his wild Talk about Mystery, " because all the common Mistakes on that " Topick are so manifestly discover'd by a very great Master, that I do not expect a " Man of Reputation will in hast venture a " Defence against him. I do not pretend much to Reputation: I am willing to be made as the Filth of the World, and the Off-scouring of all things. But I solemnly profess, by the Grace of GOD, to hold the MYSTERY of the Faith in a pure Conscience: And I should defile my Conscience with a very foul Sin of Omission, if I should not publish my Animadversions upon that very wicked Book entitled Christianity not mysterious. I Beseech the only wise GOD to convince you of all your Errors, and to lead you by his holy Spirit into all Truth, and to give you all things which he knows to be best for you,

Your Servt

E. E.

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# Animadversions

Upon a BOOK Entituled,  
**Christianity not Mysterious.**

"R Eason, says this Author, may be de-  
 "fin'd, that Faculty of the Soul,  
 "which discovers the Certainty of any thing  
 "dubious or obscure, by comparing it with  
 "something evidently known.

*Answ.* This is no Definition of *Reason*, but  
 an inadequate Description of the *Humane Intel-  
 lect or Understanding*. **ESSENTIAL  
 REASON IS INFINITE WISDOM or  
 KNOWLEDGE** absolutely perfect of Be-  
 ing absolutely infinite. Being absolutely IN-  
 FINITE communicating it self to the *Hu-  
 man Understanding*, produces that *Conception*  
 which we call the **IDEA OF GOD**. This  
 is **REASON PARTICIPATED** by all *Ra-  
 tional Creatures*. The *Humane Intellect or  
 Understanding* is that Power or Faculty of  
 the *Soul of Man*, by which he is capable of  
 apprehending or perceiving that there is a  
*Being*

*Being absolutely infinite, that is, GOD; and that all Finite Beings, Natures, or Essences, and all natural Motions or Operations are deriv'd from him.* The *Intellect* is commonly call'd *Reason*. The Ground of which Appellation is this, that every Act of the *Intellect* or *Understanding*, so far as it is not deprav'd or perverted by the *Will*, is nothing else but the *Perception of ESSENTIAL REASON* in it self, or in its Effects.

P. 23, 24. "No Christian I know of now  
 "expressly says *Reason* and the *Gospel* are con-  
 "trary to one another: But, which returns  
 "to the same, very many affirm, that tho'  
 "the Doctrines of the latter cannot in them-  
 "selves be contradictory to the Principles of  
 "the former, as proceeding both from GOD,  
 "yet that according to our Conceptions of  
 "them, they may seem directly to clash:  
 "And that tho' we cannot reconcile them by  
 "reason of our corrupt and limited Under-  
 "standings; yet that from the Authority of  
 "Divine Revelation, we are bound to believe  
 "and acquiesce in them; or, as the Fathers  
 ". taught 'em to speak, to adore what we can-  
 "not comprehend.

*Answ.* We do not say that *Reason* and the *Gospel* do ever seem to clash, or to contradict one another, but only to those Men, who by the Perverseness of their *Will*, averting it self from the *Divine Goodness*, avert their *Understanding* from the *Truth* of that Doctrine which is destructive to all their *Lusts* or Inclinations arising from the *false Appearance* of

of Good. We say indeed that the *Fathers* have taught us, according to the *Holy Scriptures*, that we must *adore* what we cannot *comprehend*. He that performs any true and acceptable Worship to Almighty GOD, does most humbly and heartily acknowledge that the Object of his Worship has all the Excellency and Perfection that he can apprehend or conceive, as signified by these Words, *Power, Wisdom, Goodness, &c.* And that it is infinitely more excellent and glorious than can ever be any way apprehended or conceived by *Men or Angels*. 'Tis evident that though we know GOD in some measure, he infinitely transcends the Comprehension of our *Reason or Understanding*. But says our Adversary, p. 78. "to comprehend in all " correct Authors, is nothing else but to know.

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* Comprehension is Knowledge, but all Knowledge is not Comprehension : Comprehension is that Knowledge which extends to all that can be known of the *Object*.

P: 88. "As for GOD, we Comprehend "nothing better than his Attributes. We "know not, tis true the Nature of that eter- "nal Subject, or *Essence* wherein Infinite "Goodness, Love, Knowledge, Power and "Wisdom coexist ; but we are not better ac- "quainted with the *real Essence* of any of his "Creatures.

Here'tis manifest that this Man's most prodigious *Self-conceit* and Affectation of SINGU-  
LARITY averts his *Understanding* from a  
due

due Reflexion upon the true IDEA OF GOD in his own Soul, and in the Souls of all Men, in the Contemplation whereof we may easily discern this Truth, that the several divine Attributes are several Significations or Manifestations of the one Being absolutely Infinite and incomprehensible. They are not in GOD, or the *Divine Essence*, as *Accidents* in a *Subject*. To talk of the *Nature of an Essence* is an Absurdity, which, I think, no Scholar was ever guilty of, but the Author of this most impious *Libel* against the *Holy Catholick Church*. There cannot be a more Notorious Contradiction than to say we **COMPREHEND INFINITE Goodness, Love, &c.** We grant that every Pious Man is better acquainted with the *Divine Attributes* than with the Properties of any Creature: But we know 'tis absolutely impossible for any Man or Angel to *Comprehend* the *Divine Essence*; and we know 'tis not so impossible to comprehend the *Nature or Essence* of any Creature: Therefore I think it my Duty to proclaim to all the World my just Abhorrence and Detestation of the blind Boldness of this *insolent Writer*. "I think," says he, I may now warrantably conclude "that nothing is a Mystery because we know "not its *Essence*, since it appears that it is "neither knowable in it self, nor ever "thought of by us: So that the divine Being "himself cannot, with more Reason, be ac- "counted *mysterious* in this respect than the "most contemptible of his Creatures.

*Answe.*

*Answe.* If the divine Being be truly and really INFINITE, then there is infinite more Reason that this Being should be accounted mysterious in this respect, than it passeth Knowledge, or the utmost Capacity of our intellectual Faculty, than the most glorious of his Creatures.

P. 91. " Such Revelations of God in the New Testament are call'd Mysteries not from any present Inconceivableness or Obscurity, but with respect to what they were before this Revelation, as that is called our Task, which we long since perform'd.

I shall here entreat the pious and learned Reader to employ his Thoughts in the deepest Search after the true and genuine Sense of these sacred Words, 1 Tim. 3. 9. " Holding the MYSTERY of the Faith in a pure Conscience. Ἐχοτας τὸ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ τῆς πίστεως  
καθαρὰ Συνεδέοι. The principal Object of Christian Faith is the Person of JESUS CHRIST; so that no Man can ever know any thing contain'd in the Holy Scriptures ( Καθὼς δὲ Γνῶναι, 1 Cor. 8. 2.) As he ought to know, but when his Apprehensions of it have Reference to the Love of CHRIST, which ( though it be known in some measure ) PASSETH KNOWLEDGE, that is to say, is incomprehensible, having no other Foundation than the INFINITY of the divine Goodness. Γνῶναι τοτέοντος οὐπερβάλλουσαν τὴν γνώσιν Ἀγάπην τὸν Χειρόν. Eph. 3. 19. To have a due Reference to CHRIST in our Apprehensions of any Doctrine contain'd in the *Holy*

*Holy Scriptures* is to give a firm and immovable Assent to it, Καθὼς δὲν Ἀλήσιν εἰ ποὺ  
ΙΗΣΟΥ, *As the Truth is in JESUS*, who being GOD from everlasting did in time, take on him the Nature of Man to save us from our Sins. To be sav'd from all known Sin, so that we would rather lay down our Lives than hold the Truth in Unrighteousness, or knowingly and wilfully transgress the Law of our Maker, Redeemer and Sanctifyer, is to keep a pure Conscience. And he that keeps a pure Conscience through CHRIST enabling him will easily conceive that this Expression of St. Paul, Ἐχει τὸ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ τὸ Πίστως εἰ  
καθαρὴ Συνεδίσαι is of the same Signification with those Words of St. John, 1 Epist. 5. 12, Ἐχει τὸν τίον. “He that hath (or holdeth) the SON, hath Life: And he that hath not the SON of God hath not Life. If Jesus Christ, the everlasting Son of the Father, were not Reveal'd, he could not be the Object of Our Faith: But the clearest Revelation we have of him does not make him cease to be a MYSTERY: Great is the MYSTERY of Godliness. GOD was manifest in the Flesh, &c. The SON OF GOD is reveal'd, not only as the Object of our Knowledge, but also of our everlasting Admiration. His Name shall be called WONDERFUL, Isaiah 9. 6. I shall endeavour to give the candid Reader a further Illustration of this most important Truth, by making some Reflections upon some other Expressions of the blessed Apostle, Rom. 16, 25, 26, 27. “Now to him that is of Pow-

“ er

"er to establish you according to my Gospel,  
 "and the preaching of Jesus Christ ( accor-  
 "ding to the Revelation of the MYSTERY,  
 "which was kept secret since the World be-  
 "gan, but now is made manifest, and by the  
 "Scriptures of the Prophets according to the  
 "Commandment of the everlasting God  
 "made known to all Nations for the Obedi-  
 "ence of Faith ) to God only Wise be Glory  
 "through Jesus Christ, for ever, Amen.

The holy Apostle calls the principal Subject  
 of all his preaching ( viz. ) that JESUS  
**CHRIST** is the Propitiation for the Sins  
 of the whole World ) a MYSTERY both  
 with respect to its having been kept secret,  
 and with respect to its present Manifestation.  
 If the Word *Mystery* signified nothing else,  
 but a Matter kept secret, viz. wholly secret or  
 undiscover'd, then indeed the Matter being  
 Reveal'd, there would be no *Mystery*. But  
 certainly if the word had no other Significati-  
 on, but of a Matter kept secret, the Apostle  
 would never have us'd this Expression, the  
*Revelation of the Mystery that was kept secret*.  
 But says our Adversary, Yes : Even "As  
 that may be call'd our Task which we have long  
 since perform'd.

*Answ.* A Task being a Work which we are  
 enjoyn'd to perform, we may properly say, it  
 was our Task, but 'twould be absurd to say that  
 any Work is our Task, which we have long since  
 perform'd. 'Tis evident therefore, that the  
 blessed Apostle, by the word *Mystery*, wou'd  
 have us to understand that the principal Sub-  
 ject

ject of all his preaching, viz. that JESUS CHRIST is the Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, though now it be made known or declar'd to all Nations, still remains a Mystery, being such a wonderful Contrivance and Effect of infinite Wisdom and Power to reconcile infinite vindictive Justice or Hatred of SIN, to infinite Goodness and Mercy in bringing SINNERS to true Repentance and eternal Life, that it passeth Knowledge, i. e. that it infinitely transcends the utmost Capacity of any finite Understanding, so that a pious Soul in the Contemplation thereof finds Matter of perpetual ADMIRATION, Eph. 3. 8, 9. "Unto me who am less than the least of all Saints, is this Grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the UNSEARCHABLE RICHES of Christ; and to make all Men see what is the Fellowship of the MYSTERY, which from the Beginning of the World hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. By the Riches of Christ we are to understand the Abundance of his Excellencies and Perfections communicable to those that OBEY him by Virtue of his being the Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World. The blessed Apostle plainly shews that the Subject of his preaching is a MYSTERY in that he calls it the unsearchable Riches of Christ ( Τοις ἀναγνώσον πλεῖτον τῷ Χριστῷ,) In the following Verse he expressly calls it a Mystery.

The LORD grant that by the Illumination of his holy Spirit we may so clearly under-

( 16 )

understand that CHRISTIANITY is MYSTERIOUS, i. e. that the RICHES OF CHRIST are UNSEARCHABLE, that all our natural Desires of Knowledge may be so sanctified, as to be resolv'd into this one Desire, that we may know the Love of Christ, which passeth Knowledge, that we may be fill'd with all the Fullness of GOD.

ΕΡΧΟΥ ΚΤΡΙΕ ΙΗΣΟΥ.

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F I N I S.

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